

Literacy Assessments for Home School Families

While assessments should never be used to label a child or determine academic ability, they can be helpful in guiding your instruction as a home school parent in pinpointing specific areas of strength and/or struggle in your children’s literacy skills. Should you want to monitor your child’s reading progress over time, literacy assessments can also be used as a form of progress monitoring, meaning they can demonstrate reading growth in a very tangible way. Progress is best done on a monthly or quarterly basis. (Note: All the below assessments are adapted from *Assessment for Reading Instruction* by Stahl, Flanigan, and McKenna (4th edition, 2020).)

Tests of Alphabet Recognition

Either place a piece of paper with all the letters of the alphabet in front of your child or lay out flashcards of all the individual letters. (Whether a child is reading the letters from a single piece of paper or from flashcards, the letters should be in random order so that a child cannot depend on the “Alphabet Song” from memory.) There should be two rounds of this assessment: one using only upper case letters and one using lower case letters. You can also opt to do a “challenge assessment,” meaning all 26 letters are used but are done with a combination of both upper and lower cases. Any letters not recognized correctly can be focused on in future reading lessons.

Tests of Phonological Awareness

These quick assessments can help you see if your child is understanding basic concepts of letters and sounds. Mastery is indicated if your child is able to complete four of the five items correctly (80%). Should your child not meet this benchmark, this indicates an area where additional instruction is needed. You can easily perform multiple variations of these assessments by using your own words as well. It’s important to remember that phonological awareness in the following assessments involves only auditory awareness (not reading/visual awareness).

Skill: Rhyming-Activity #1

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“Cat and hat go together because they rhyme. Listen to the following groups of words and tell me which word doesn’t rhyme with the others.”

1. trip rip mud
2. pat stop mat
3. door car far
4. hop dog flop
5. melt feet seat

Skill: Rhyming-Activity #2

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“Come up with your own word that rhymes with the word I give you.”

1. me Child’s answer: _____
2. day Child’s answer: _____
3. pin Child’s answer: _____
4. mug Child’s answer: _____
5. fog Child’s answer: _____

Skill: Phoneme Isolation (Beginning Sounds)

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“The first sound I hear in cat is /c/. Tell me the first sound that you hear in the following words.”

1. time
2. path
3. kite
4. soap
5. milk

Skill: Phoneme Isolation (Ending Sounds)

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“The last sound that I hear in cat is /t/. Tell me the last sound that you hear in the following words.”

1. buzz
2. silk
3. lip
4. teeth
5. phone

Skill: Phoneme Identity

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“What is the same about the three words that I say?” Child should answer using the sound, not the letter name.

1. long light line
2. stone stop stick
3. rug rat rust
4. vase vote vessel
5. brown brother braid

Skill: Phoneme Categorization

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“Listen to the beginning sounds of the words I say. Which word doesn’t belong?”

1. song soap shoe
2. butter door belt
3. toe doll duck
4. hug ham gown
5. wagon yellow wind

Skill: Phonemic Blending

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“I am going to give you a series of three sounds. See if you can put the sounds together to make a word. For example, if I say /d/ /o/ /g/, what word does that make if you put those sounds together? That’s right, the word *dog*.” Make sure you provide your child with the phonemes (sounds), not the letters themselves.

1. /h/ /oe/ /s/ (hose)
2. /b/ /u/ /g/ (bug)
3. /ch/ /i/ /p/ (chip)
4. /s/ // /i/ /p/ (slip)
5. /d/ /o/ /g/ (dog)

Skill: Phonemic Addition

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“Say *ake*. Now put /c/ at the beginning of *-ake*. What word did you make? That’s right: *cake*. Let’s make more words like that.” Make sure you provide your child with the phonemes (sounds), not the letters themselves.

1. Say *oat*. Now put /b/ at the beginning. (*boat*)
2. Say *an*. Now put /f/ at the beginning. (*fan*)
3. Say *ate*. Now put /l/ at the beginning. (*late*)
4. Say *en*. Now put /h/ at the beginning. (*hen*)
5. Say *op*. Now put /st/ at the beginning. (*stop*)

Skill: Phonemic Deletion

Number Correct out of 5: _____

“Say *fake*. Now say *fake* without the /f/. What is left? That’s right, *ake*.” Make sure you provide your child with the phonemes (sounds), not the letters themselves.

1. Say *park* without the /p/. (*ark*)
2. Say *soft* without the /s/. (*oft*)
3. Say *crab* without the /c/. (*rab*)
4. Say *tub* without the /t/. (*ub*)
5. Say *home* without the /h/. (*ome*)

Skill: Phonemic Substitution

Number Correct out of 5: _____

When reading these sentences to your child, make sure you provide only the phonemes (sounds), not the letters themselves.

1. Say the word *lake*. Change /k/ to /d/ to make a new word. (*lade*)
2. Say the word *feet*. Change /f/ to /s/ to make a new word. (*seat*)
3. Say the word *care*. Change /c/ to /ch/ to make a new word. (*chair*)
4. Say the word *mud*. Change the /d/ to /g/ to make a new word. (*mug*)
5. Say the word *brag*. Change the /b/ to /p/ to make a new word. (*prag*)

Skill: Phonemic Segmentation

Number Correct out of 5: _____

"I am going to say a word to you, and I would like you to break the word apart, saying each sound separately in order. For example, if I say *dog*, you would say /d/ /o/ /g/.

1. deep (/d/ /ee/ /p/)
2. hay (/h/ /ay/)
3. goat (/g/ /oa/ /t/)
4. soft (/s/ /o/ /f/ /t/)
5. black (/b/ /l/ /a/ /ck/)

Tests of Sight Words/Fry Sight-Word Inventory

These words are listed ordered by frequency of use in the English language and are read from top to bottom (not across). You do not need to time your child or make any special notes. Simply print out two copies of these lists—one for you and one for your child. Circle any words your child does not know automatically. Any missed sight words should be practiced until the point of automaticity. You can also use flashcards in place of lists.

First 100 Words

the	or	will	number
of	one	up	no
and	had	other	way
a	by	about	could
to	word	out	people
in	but	many	my
is	not	then	than
you	what	them	first
that	all	these	water
it	were	so	been
he	we	some	call
was	when	her	who
for	your	would	oil
on	can	make	now
are	said	like	find
as	there	him	long
with	use	into	down
his	an	time	day
they	each	has	did
I	which	look	get
at	she	two	come
be	do	more	made
this	how	write	may
have	their	go	part
from	if	see	over

Second 100 Words

new	great	put	kind
sound	where	end	hand
take	help	does	picture
only	through	another	again
little	much	well	change
work	before	large	off
know	line	must	play
place	right	big	spell
year	too	even	air
live	mean	such	away
me	old	because	animal
back	any	turn	house
give	same	here	point
most	tell	why	page
very	boy	ask	letter
after	follow	went	mother
thing	came	men	answer
our	went	read	found
just	show	need	study
name	also	land	still
good	around	different	learn
sentence	form	home	should
man	three	us	America
think	small	move	world
say	set	try	high

Third 100 Words

every	left	until	idea
near	don't	children	enough
add	few	side	eat
food	while	feet	face
between	along	car	watch
own	might	mile	far
below	close	night	jump
country	something	walk	real
plant	seem	while	almost
last	next	sea	let
school	hard	began	above
father	open	grow	girl
keep	example	took	sometimes
tree	begin	rive	mountain
never	life	four	cur
start	always	carry	young
city	those	state	talk
earth	both	once	soon
eye	paper	book	list
light	together	hear	song
thought	got	stop	leave
head	group	without	family
under	often	second	body
story	run	late	music
saw	important	miss	color

Tests of Fluency

One way to determine the fluency strength of a child is to calculate the number of words read per minute. To do this, select a passage that you believe to be at your child's reading level. (Ideally, it should be a passage he/she has never seen before.) For students who are at the end of their kindergarten year or beginning of their first grade year, the passage should be about 25 words long. For students in the middle of their first grade year, the passage should be 50 words long. Students at the end of first grade through third grade should have a passage that is 100 words long.

Ask your child to start reading out loud. Time how long it takes your child to complete the passage. (You may not want to let your child know he/she is being timed, as then he/she may feel pressure to perform or race to finish reading all the words without paying attention to accuracy.) If you would like to calculate an actual average for how many words were read in the minute, take the number of words in the selection (i.e. 25, 50, or 100), multiply by 60, and then divide that number by however long it took your child to read the entire passage. If a beginning first-grader takes 72 seconds to read a 50-word passage, then your formula would be:

$$50 \times 60 = 3,000 \qquad 3,000/72 = \text{about } 42$$

Your child can read approximately 42 words per minute. Click [here](#) to see a chart that lets you know average words-per-minute benchmarks for students in grades 1-8.

While your child is reading, if you notice that he/she makes several miscues, take note of these. Some examples of reading miscues are the child **inserts words** that aren't actually printed (i.e. "The (brown) bear..." the child adds the word *brown* even though it isn't written in the text), **omits words** (i.e. "The little ~~baby~~ bear was all alone."), **says an incorrect word** (i.e. says the word *terrific* instead of *terrible*), **repeats words** (i.e. "Jim saw a bear...a bear."), **reverses words** (says "They are twins." instead of what is actually written: "Are they twins?"), or simply **can't pronounce/sound out a word**. Once miscues have been identified, you will know specific reading habits where you can provide some additional instructional support for your child. (See the "Teaching Reading at Home" document for suggestions.)

Tests of Comprehension

The main goal of reading is comprehension, also known as understanding. If you want to see if your child is understanding what he/she is reading, ask a variety of questions about the text. (Using the same texts you used to determine words per minute is a way to save you the trouble of having to find new material.) When looking for comprehension skills, a text that is unfamiliar to the child should be used (the text can either be fiction or non-fiction). After your child reads the text aloud, and regardless of how quickly the text was read or how many miscues were made, ask a variety of questions (about five questions for kindergartens and first graders, ten questions for the end of first grade and older). Try to make sure the questions are a combination of fact (i.e. What color was the boy's shirt?), inference (i.e. What do you think would have happened if the boy hadn't walked through this house with muddy shoes?), evaluation (i.e. Can you think of places where you would find a lot of mud?), and vocabulary

(i.e. What do you think *mucky* means in this story?). You can also simply ask your child to re-tell what the passage was about to gain an overview of whether or not he/she understood what was being read. If you notice that your child struggles with answering a type of question, such as making inferences or understanding new vocabulary in context, then you know areas where additional instructional support can be given.

It's important to remember that a child who can decode and read words quickly and fluently does not always understand what he/she is reading. The ability to read is complex. Children need to be able to decode words in context, read them fluently and quickly enough so that meaning isn't lost, and then process what the words are actually saying. Just because a child has a strength in one area of reading does not necessarily mean that all areas of reading are strengths. (Likewise, a weakness in an area of reading does not mean that skills are weak in all of reading.) Being able to identify specific strengths and struggles helps you meet the needs of your emerging reader better, and doing some informal assessments may help guide your instruction in a way that benefits your child the most. (For information on teaching reading at home, to include curriculum suggestions and instructional strategies, click [here](#).

Happy teaching, and happy learning!